

American

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Broken Promises, U.N. Inaction Doomed Annan's Syria Mission

02 August 2012

Washington — The Obama administration praised the efforts of Kofi Annan, the outgoing joint special envoy of the United Nations and the Arab League for the Syria crisis, but officials also said Annan's efforts could not succeed because the Syrian government would not honor its promises, and the U.N. Security Council failed to support meaningful measures that would pressure Syrians to begin a peaceful political process.

"Mr. Annan is to be commended for taking on such a thankless and difficult task at great personal cost," U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations Susan Rice said in an August 2 statement.

Praising Annan, a Nobel Peace Prize winner who also served as U.N. secretary-general from 1997 through 2006, Rice said he had taken on the mission "because, as he has throughout his distinguished career, Mr. Annan placed service to the U.N. and the cause of peace above any personal interest."

Annan was appointed to the position in February, and he put forward a six-point peace plan designed to end the 17-month-old crisis between Bashar al-Assad's regime and Syrians calling for greater human rights and political freedoms. The plan called for an end to violence, unrestricted access for the international media and humanitarian agencies, the release of detainees and the start of an inclusive political dialogue between the regime and the opposition.

Rice said the Assad regime "continuously broke its pledges to implement the six-point plan and persisted in using horrific violence against its own people."

She added that the Security Council "failed to heed Mr. Annan's repeated calls for collective and significant consequences for noncompliance with its prior resolutions." The members who blocked such action in the council, she added, "effectively made Mr. Annan's mission impossible."

Speaking to reporters in Geneva August 2, Annan said the increasing militarization of the Syrian conflict and the lack of unity in the Security Council had "fundamentally changed the circumstances for the effective exercise" of his role, according to the U.N. News Centre.

"The bloodshed continues, most of all because of the Syrian government's intransigence and continuing refusal to implement the six-point plan, and also because of the escalating military campaign of the opposition — all of

which is compounded by the disunity of the international community," he said.

The six-point plan "should have been automatically endorsed by the Security Council" and built upon by the international community, he said.

"Without serious, purposeful and united international pressure, including from the powers of the region, it is impossible for me, or anyone, to compel the Syrian government in the first place, and also the opposition, to take the steps necessary to begin a political process," Annan said.

White House press secretary Jay Carney said August 2 that Annan's resignation highlights Assad's broken promises to abide by the peace plan and his continuing to "brutally murder his own people, to use heavy weapons in assaults on civilian population centers, [and] to call on his own generals to kill Syrian people in his name."

"It is disgusting and really highlights the absolute requirement that for the future of the Syrian people, Assad must step aside," Carney said.

In addition, Carney said Annan's departure calls attention to the vetoes by Russia and China in the U.N. Security Council of resolutions that would have held Assad accountable.

"Those vetoes ... were highly regrettable and placed both Russia and China on the wrong side of history and the wrong side of the Syrian people," Carney said.

OBAMA APPROVES MORE HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

Carney announced that President Obama has approved an additional \$12 million in U.S. humanitarian assistance to Syria, bringing the U.S. commitment to more than \$76 million. The U.S. assistance focuses on Syrians who are most urgently in need, both inside the country and in neighboring countries that are hosting them and providing them with aid.

Through the funds, the United States is providing international and local nongovernmental organizations with food, water, medical supplies, clothing, hygiene kits and other humanitarian relief for distribution.

"We continue to work with our international partners, including the Friends of Syria, to provide humanitarian aid to the Syrian people," Carney said.

He added that the U.S. position on providing assistance to the Syrian opposition "has not changed."

"We provide nonlethal assistance to the opposition. We don't believe that adding to the number of weapons in Syria is what's needed to help bring about a peaceful transition," Carney said.

White House Issues First-Ever Biosurveillance Strategy

By Charlene Porter | Staff Writer | 01 August 2012

White House — Working to better protect the public — domestically and internationally — from biological threats affecting human, animal or plant health, the Obama administration released its *National Strategy for Biosurveillance* July 31.

While the nation has been on alert for chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) threats since the 2001 terrorist attacks, this strategy aims to extend that surveillance to include emerging infectious diseases, possible pandemics, agricultural threats and food-borne illnesses. A summary of the strategy released by the White House says the plan will "enhance all-hazards incident management ... whether an incident is deliberate, accidental or naturally occurring."

The strategy was released with a statement from President Obama. The strategy's "goal is to provide the critical information and ongoing situational awareness that enables better decisionmaking at all levels," he said.

Biological threats have caused a number of serious incidents in the United States over the last decade or so, involving alarm, illness outbreaks, and even death. A notorious case of anthrax spores maliciously sent through the mails to various recipients in 2001 killed five people and sickened 17, and remains "the worst biological attacks in U.S. history," according to the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Law enforcement agencies spent years investigating that deliberate act of biological terrorism before a culprit was identified.

Sometimes naturally occurring perpetrators are the culprits, along with lapses in proper food-handling procedures. Cases of tainted spinach, hamburger or cantaloupe have been known to cause illness in dozens, even hundreds of people around the country. Such outbreaks cause significant consumer fear about what's in the refrigerator, but also serious economic losses across whole states or regions as consumers, supermarkets and grocers dispose of heaps of foodstuffs rather than risk consumption or spread of a disease-causing pathogen.

The new surveillance strategy aims to "enhance the nation's ability to detect, track, investigate, and navigate incidents" affecting health, the document says, to better

protect the safety and well-being of the nation.

In the last week of July alone, four food-borne illness outbreaks occurred around the country, the largest involving 76 people in 22 states with one death, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The strategy must maintain a global health perspective, the document says, noting recent cases of rapidly traveling pathogens, which have underscored diseases' disregard for international borders. Citing "our shared participation in global health security," the strategy says, "we should reinforce international connections with our national enterprise as the global biosurveillance network continues to grow."

Identifying biosurveillance as "a top national security priority," the strategy's intent is to save lives "by providing essential information for better decisionmaking at all levels."

The strategy document proposes a number of steps to strengthen biosurveillance — for example, the inclusion of social media in public awareness campaigns as a way to empower communities with early warnings of threats locally or globally.

The identification of new scientific and technological methods for improving biosurveillance activities is also proposed, suggesting a means of "forecasting likely CBRN incidents, food-borne illness, environmental disasters and outbreak trajectories in the absence of definitive data." By following trails laid in economic and weather forecasting, the strategy says, "there are innovative ways to combine information and known facts to project what is likely to transpire."

An implementation plan for a better-integrated biosurveillance strategy will be developed over the next few months.

Expanded U.S. Sanctions on Iran Focus on Petrochemicals, Banks

By Stephen Kaufman | Staff Writer | 01 August 2012

Washington — President Obama has broadened U.S. sanctions on Iran as concerns continue over the country's nuclear program and its failure to comply with its international obligations to suspend uranium enrichment and demonstrate that it is not developing nuclear weapons under the guise of a civilian energy program.

In a July 31 statement, Obama said he had approved a new executive order that increases the scope of U.S. sanctions targeting Iran's energy and petrochemical sectors to "deter Iran from establishing payment mechanisms for the purchase of Iranian oil to circumvent

existing sanctions.” He also said that the U.S. Treasury Department had sanctioned China’s Bank of Kunlun and Iraq’s Elaf Islamic Bank because they had “facilitated transactions worth millions of dollars on behalf of Iranian banks that are subject to sanctions for their links to Iran’s illicit proliferation activities.”

The president said that, since assuming office in January 2009, he has presented Iran’s leaders with “a clear choice.” Either “come in line with your international obligations and rejoin the community of nations, or face growing consequences.”

He said the United States remains committed to a diplomatic solution to resolve the international standoff over Iran’s nuclear program “but the onus is on Iran to abide by its international obligations.” If Iran’s government “continues its defiance, there should be no doubt that the United States and our partners will continue to impose increasing consequences,” he said.

Deputy National Security Advisor Ben Rhodes told reporters in a July 31 conference call that the United States is “determined to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon.”

Currently, Iran does not have a nuclear weapon, and the Obama administration believes that “there is time and space to pursue a diplomatic strategy” that will also allow economic pressure from the United States and other countries more time to have an effect, he said.

“That increasingly sharpens the choice of the Iranian government, and that gives them an opportunity to come in line with their obligations through diplomacy while also making it clear that all options remain on the table for achieving the objective of preventing Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon,” Rhodes said.

Iran’s international obligations include “the suspension of their enrichment activities consistent with existing U.N. Security Council resolutions,” as well as adhering to “increased safeguards on their program,” he said.

Iran has yet to demonstrate that its nuclear program “is in line with peaceful purposes,” and it has not complied with its obligations to allow the International Atomic Energy Agency adequate access and inspections of its nuclear facilities, as well as heeding the Security Council’s call for a suspension of uranium enrichment, he said.

“Clearly, Iran has a set of capabilities that have caused the international community to pass U.N. Security Council resolution after U.N. Security Council resolution. They have, for instance, built a facility in Qom that was constructed as an illicit facility. And doing so, of course, raises very significant questions about what the intent of

the Iranian nuclear program is,” Rhodes said.

Rhodes said sanctions are having “a significant impact” on Iran and its economy, noting that its currency has lost almost 38 percent of its value over the past year, many international companies have divested themselves from the country, and Iranian oil exports have plummeted, resulting in less revenues the government can spend on nuclear technology and other procurements for its nuclear program. He also cited the international support for the economic pressure on Iran.

“If the United States was acting on its own to impose sanctions, those sanctions would not be nearly as impactful as what we’ve managed to build internationally. So the ability to have a multilateral sanctions regime in place, that was supported by Russia and China among others, has allowed us to broaden the consequences for the Iranian government. And the ability to get like-minded countries in Europe, Asia, and elsewhere to significantly increase and build up from that foundation has only further sharpened the pressure on the Iranian government,” Rhodes said.

“Iran has an opportunity, through diplomacy, to come in line with their international obligations with respect to their nuclear program,” Rhodes said. “However, we’ve also made it clear that if Iran fails to meet its obligations, we will steadily ratchet up the pressure. And indeed, we have done so over the course of the last several years.”

Worldwide Terrorist Attacks Fell 12 Percent in 2011

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr. | Staff Writer | 31 July 2012

Washington — Ambassador Daniel Benjamin says 2011 was a significant year for counterterrorism efforts worldwide as al-Qaida lost its leader of 22 years along with a number of other key operatives.

“We saw millions of citizens throughout the Middle East advance peaceful public demands for change without any reference to al-Qaida’s incendiary worldview,” Benjamin said at a State Department briefing. He is the department’s coordinator for counterterrorism.

The State Department released its congressionally mandated Country Reports on Terrorism 2011 in Washington July 31.

The annual report, which is compiled by several U.S. government agencies and U.S. embassies, noted that the loss of Osama bin Laden and other key operatives put the al-Qaida network on “a path of decline that will be difficult to reverse.” Bin Laden was killed in a special operations raid on his compound in May 2011. It was the terrorist group al-Qaida that launched the 2001 terrorist attack on the United States that killed nearly 3,000 people

from more than 88 nations in a single day.

The report noted that the successes against al-Qaida are attributable, in large part, to global counterterrorism cooperation, which has put considerable pressure on the al-Qaida core leadership, though it also notes that al-Qaida and its affiliates and adherents remain adaptable.

“They have shown resilience; retain the capacity to conduct regional and transnational attacks; and, thus, constitute an enduring and serious threat to our national security,” the report said.

According to the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), there were 10,283 terrorist attacks in 2011, affecting 43,990 victims from 70 countries. The number of people killed by terrorists in 2011 totaled 12,533, which fell 12 percent from the 13,193 deaths reported in 2010 and was nearly 29 percent below the 22,720 deaths reported in 2007. The fall in the number of deaths due to terrorist attacks began after 2005 and has shown a steady decline since, the report indicated.

The 2011 numbers in the NCTC annex represent five-year lows, but underscore the human toll and geographic reach of terrorism, the report said. “The [Middle] East and South Asia continued to experience the most attacks, incurring just over 75 percent of the 2011 total,” the NCTC annex said.

The report also noted an increase in attacks that occurred in Africa and in the Western Hemisphere, “exhibiting the constant evolution of the terrorist threat.” The report said the number of terrorist attacks fell 14 percent in Afghanistan and 16 percent in Iraq.

Secretary Clinton Calls on Global Community to Promote Religious Tolerance

By MacKenzie C. Babb | Staff Writer | 30 July 2012

Washington — Protecting religious freedom in countries around the world promotes peace, stability and security for the international community and remains a fundamental concern of the United States, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said at the rollout of the State Department’s 14th annual International Religious Freedom Report.

“Religious freedom is both an essential element of human dignity and of secure, thriving societies,” Clinton said July 30 at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington. “It’s been statistically linked with economic development and democratic stability, and it creates a climate in which people from different religions can move beyond distrust and work together to solve their shared problems.”

Clinton said President Obama’s administration has elevated religious freedom as a diplomatic priority.

“Together with governments, international organizations and civil society, we have worked to shape and implement United Nations Human Rights Council Resolution 1618, which seeks to protect people under attack or discriminated against because of their faith,” the secretary said.

She called on countries around the world to join in a global effort to promote religious tolerance and protect religious freedom, saying that governments “have solemn obligations to protect the human rights of all citizens, no matter what religions they believe or don’t believe.”

Clinton said the State Department’s latest report comes as an urgent reminder that religious freedom is shrinking around the world.

“More than a billion people live under governments that systematically suppress religious freedom,” she said. “When it comes to this human right ... the world is sliding backwards.”

U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom Suzan Johnson Cook introduced the report, which reviews the status of religious freedom in 199 countries and territories, earlier in the day at the State Department.

She said the document “details increasing intolerance against a range of religious communities,” such as a rise in anti-Semitism in several countries, demonstrated by increased attacks on adults and children as well as the desecration of cemeteries.

Other troubling trends during the year included a number of governments detaining and imprisoning individuals because of their religious beliefs. Some countries used blasphemy and apostasy laws to curb religious freedom, Cook said, and others misused laws to restrict the freedoms of religion, expression and assembly.

Cook said governments limited citizens’ right to wear or not to wear religious attire, as some countries passed laws to ban attire covering the face while others forced women to cover themselves entirely.

She said many governments used registration laws to restrict the rights of religious communities, including rigid rules making it impossible for groups to own property or to receive state financial support.

“This type of favoritism by governments can empower societal abuse of religious minorities,” the ambassador said.

She said the report shows that while the challenges of religious intolerance are daunting, change is possible.

"It takes all of us — governments, faith communities, civil societies — working together to ensure that all people have the right to believe or not to believe," Cook said. "Each of us has a role to play in promoting religious freedom."

The ambassador celebrated the State Department's launch of the 2012 Hours Against Hate campaign, which aims to promote respect regardless of religion, culture, gender, disability or sexual orientation.

The department's latest religious freedom report said the campaign calls upon young people "to volunteer their time to assist persons from other communities — a Jew for a Muslim charity, a man for a women's shelter, a Muslim for a Jewish clinic, a Christian for a Baha'i food pantry." It added that the campaign generated so much interest and so many hours of volunteer time that it has now been endorsed as one of the London Olympic and Paralympic Games Organizing Committee's tolerance campaigns for the 2012 Summer Olympic Games.

The annual report calls attention to steps taken to improve religious freedom and promote tolerance while also shining a spotlight on violations of religious freedom.

The document is submitted each year to Congress in compliance with the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998. The latest edition catalogs major developments in religious freedom and tolerance around the world from January to December 2011.

Senior Officials Hold Midyear Review on U.S.-China Trade Issues

Washington — Senior U.S. and Chinese trade officials discussed recent developments in U.S.-China trade and investment relations at the July 27 U.S.-China Joint Commission on Commerce and Trade (JCCT) midyear review meeting in Washington.

Under Secretary of Commerce for International Trade Francisco Sánchez and Deputy United States Trade Representative Demetrios Marantis co-chaired the meeting with Chinese Vice Minister of Commerce Wang Chao. Ambassador Islam Siddiqui, chief agricultural negotiator for the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, and Janet Nuzum, associate administrator for policy at the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Foreign Agricultural Service, also participated in the meeting.

The two governments reviewed implementation of commitments made at the 2011 JCCT and began preparations for the 2012 JCCT meeting, which is to be

held in the United States later this year, the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative said.

"The U.S.-China trade relationship remains one of the most important in the world, but the relationship must be fair, balanced, and mutually beneficial," Sánchez said. "We will continue to push China to take concrete steps that open its markets to and level the playing field for U.S. goods and services, to ensure that these principles guide our bilateral trade ties."

Marantis said, "We leverage the JCCT process to resolve trade and investment policy challenges, and the midyear review is a key opportunity to develop momentum for this year's JCCT plenary and ensure that China fully implements last year's commitments."

China is a critical destination for U.S. manufactured goods and services, as America's third-largest export market, following neighboring Canada and Mexico. Between 2009 and 2011, U.S. goods exports to China grew by nearly 50 percent.

The JCCT, established in 1983, is the main forum for addressing bilateral trade concerns and promoting commercial opportunities between the United States and China.

Secretary Clinton Pledges Support for Southeast Asia Cultural Initiatives

By Chandley McDonald | Staff Writer | 27 July 2012

Washington — Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton visited countries in the Association of Southeast Asia Nations (ASEAN) in July to promote diplomatic and people-to-people ties.

In remarks at the U.S.-ASEAN Ministerial meeting in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, Clinton cited the 35 years of partnership between ASEAN and the United States and welcomed the chance to affirm the strong bond among the nations.

During her groundbreaking trip to Laos, she visited one of the country's oldest and most venerated cultural heritage sites, the temple and museum at Ho Phra Keo. It was the first visit by a U.S. secretary of state to Laos in 57 years.

The Ho Phra Keo temple was built in 1565 by King Setthathirat. Through many centuries, the Lao monarchy used the temple or "wat" as its royal chapel. Today, it is a museum displaying some of the most significant Lao Buddhist sculptures. With many bronze Buddha statues and intricate wall designs and carvings, this temple is a sacred place in Vientiane. The museum receives more than 100,000 visitors each year.

At the Ho Phra Keo temple, Clinton was especially interested in seeing a display of photos that reflected 10 years of cultural preservation in Laos supported by the U.S. Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation (AFCP). Clinton noted the progress made since the first project funded by the AFCP in 2001 and promised continued U.S. cooperation to preserve the cultural heritage of Laos. The U.S. funding for Ho Phra Keo temple in 2005 was spent for the registration and photo documentation of objects in the temple's collection.

Also at the Ho Phra Keo temple, Clinton announced U.S. support for additional preservation work in Laos. In announcing this initiative from the Ambassadors Fund, "a program near and dear to my heart," Clinton said, "We will be providing \$215,000 in additional preservation work to the iconic Wat Xieng Thong Temple in Luang Prabang." Her remarks reflected an ongoing commitment to preserving the cultural heritage and traditions of Laos.

Wat Xieng Thong ("Temple of the Golden City"), one of the most important Lao monasteries, remains a significant monument to traditional art, royalty and religion. The more than 20 structures on the grounds include a "sim" (temple hall), shrines, stupas, pavilions and residences, as well as gardens of various flowers, ornamental shrubs and trees.

Citing the great respect that the American people have for Laos' magnificent cultural heritage, Secretary Clinton also pointed to the importance of exchanges and cultural ties.

In her remarks at the U.S.-ASEAN Ministerial in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, Clinton stressed the people-to-people initiatives, saying: "I have to say that the one request I hear consistently as I travel throughout Southeast Asia is that people in this region want more opportunities to interact with Americans and to visit America, particularly young people. And, of course, young people are the majority of the people in the ASEAN nations. So I strongly support this outreach."

At the ministerial Clinton announced the creation of a U.S.-ASEAN Young Leaders Summit to connect the next generation of leaders. Outlining the progress on an additional program, Clinton said, "This fall, the United States will welcome the first students to Hawaii under the Brunei-U.S. English language initiative." English language capability is directly tied to economic prosperity, as it facilitates international commerce, clear diplomatic communication, scientific exchange and education linkages.

To further amplify the person-to-person experience, she added, "We have also created a pilot program for a new Fulbright-ASEAN exchange to deepen our educational ties."

Michelle Obama Leads U.S. Delegation to London Olympics

By Anastasya Lloyd-Damjanovic | Staff Writer |
27 July 2012

Washington — Leading the U.S. delegation to the 2012 Olympic Games, first lady Michelle Obama visited Team USA's training facility and hosted a Let's Move event at the American ambassador's residence in London July 27.

She was scheduled to attend the Olympics Opening Ceremony and will remain in the United Kingdom for three days.

Accompanying the first lady were U.S. Ambassador to the United Kingdom Louis Susman, former Olympic soccer player Brandi Chastain, Paralympic javelin and discus thrower Gabriel Diaz de Leon, and former Olympic swimmer Summer Sanders. Grant Hill and Dominique Dawes, both former Olympians and members of the President's Council on Fitness, Sports and Nutrition, also joined the delegation.

Obama kicked off her visit with a breakfast at the U.S. Olympic Training Facility at the University of East London, where she delivered remarks and met Team USA members. Recalling childhood memories of watching the Olympics on television, she described the Olympians as role models for American children everywhere, adding that they are "certainly inspiring me every day."

"As you all compete here, think of your fellow competitors back home, all those young kids who are going to be thinking of the visions they see of you as they go spike a ball or put their toe in that first water," Obama said. "They're going to look at you and then they're going to try something, right?"

In addition to inspiring children to excel in sports, Olympians have a vital role in influencing their lifestyles, the first lady said. Alluding to the Let's Move-U.S. Olympic Committee initiative to get 1.7 million American kids active in Olympic and Paralympic sports in 2012, Obama said the Olympics will encourage kids to get off the couch and onto the playing field.

"Our goal is to get all kids in our country and across the world in a better state of health. And that starts with getting up and moving, right?" she said. "And this is a particularly special moment for them, with you all here competing, for them to have that light bulb go off in their heads."

After meeting all the athletes competing for Team USA, Obama was treated to a demonstration of sporting precision by American fencers.

The first lady hosted a Let's Move event for 1,000 American military children from U.K. bases as well as American and British students at Ambassador Susman's Winfield House residence. There, the children met famous athletes, including David Beckham, Shawn Johnson, Carl Lewis, Bart Conner, Nadia Comaneci, Teresa Edwards, Emily Hughes, Sarah Hughes, Dikembe Mutombo and Dara Torres.

Drawing on anecdotes about speed skater Apolo Ohno and gymnast Shawn Johnson, Obama emphasized the importance of persistence and self-confidence.

"The stories of these athletes reminds us that being an Olympian isn't just about winning a gold or setting a record. It's about pushing yourself, and believing in yourself, and refusing to give up," she said. "You've got to tell yourself that time and time again, right?"

But coupled with a belief in one's ability to overcome obstacles should be a dedication to a healthy lifestyle, the first lady added.

"It's also about being active, and taking care of your bodies, you guys," she said. "You all have to start making sure that you get the exercise that you need and you eat the right foods."

After the remarks, the children played a variety of sports at various sports stations on the residence's lawn, which were provided by Nickelodeon, the NBA, USA Basketball and the U.S. Tennis Association, among several others.

On July 28, the first lady will oversee the first-ever National Let's Move Olympic Fun Day, which will be celebrated with various athletic activities in towns and cities across the United States.

U.S. Economy Grows for 12th Straight Quarter

By MacKenzie C. Babb | Staff Writer | 27 July 2012

Washington — The U.S. economy posted its 12th straight quarter of positive growth as gross domestic product (GDP) expanded by an annualized rate of 1.5 percent from April to June, according to a new Commerce Department report.

"Today's advance estimate of real GDP shows that our economy continues to heal from the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression," said acting U.S. Commerce Secretary Rebecca Blank following the report's July 27 release by the Bureau of Economic Analysis.

Blank said the growth in GDP, the total amount of goods and services produced by the country, largely coincides with 28 straight months of private sector employment gains that have totaled 4.4 million new jobs.

Alan Krueger, chairman of the White House Council of Economic Advisers, said that while the U.S. economy "continues to move in the right direction, additional growth is needed to replace jobs lost in the deep recession that began at the end of 2007."

Blank said the slow growth is due to several head winds, including a decline in state and local government activity and economic slowdowns in other countries.

Growth from April to June dropped by a quarter from 2 percentage points during the first three months of 2012, and came in significantly lower than the 4.1 percent annualized GDP growth during the fourth quarter of 2011.

This deceleration in growth was largely due to a drop in personal spending and residential fixed investment and an increase in imports. The slowing was partly offset by an upturn in private inventory investment, a smaller decrease in federal government spending and an acceleration in exports, according to the report.

The new release also provided an annual revision of GDP figures back to 2009. While it did not meaningfully change the pace of growth over the period, it did revise the expansion of the economy to 6.7 percent overall during the last three years with private components of GDP growing by 9.9 percent during the period.

Revised second-quarter figures based on new data will be released August 29, according to the Commerce Department.

AIDS 2012: Future of AIDS Fight Is in Leadership, Accountability

27 July 2012

Washington — The international movement to beat the AIDS epidemic has achieved more in the last 10 years than anyone would have thought possible in 2002. Eight million people around the world are receiving life sustaining treatment to control HIV infection and prevent the development of AIDS. Millions more need it as governments around the world develop strategies on how to sustain and expand the population now receiving treatment.

The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria and the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) have been two of the primary sources of funding for medicines, treatment, care and support that is saving the lives of HIV-infected persons. But about 7 million more people worldwide are eligible for treatment and have not yet received it. The questions facing international health planners now are whether treatment can be expanded and can it be sustained.

"We can have universal coverage, we can have sustainability," said Global Fund General Manager Gabriel Jaramillo as he participated in a panel discussion July 26 looking at future needs and costs.

The panel was convened at the XIX International AIDS Conference being held in Washington July 22-July 27.

A key predictor of how AIDS funding could unfold in the years ahead came before the conference began. The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) released findings July 18 showing that low- and middle-income countries had devoted \$8.6 billion for their response to the epidemic in 2011, exceeding the amounts provided by international donor organizations and nations for the first time.

Appearing on the same panel with Jaramillo, U.S. Global AIDS Ambassador Dr. Eric Goosby said financial investment from the affected countries will be critical to future success.

"In order to achieve a durable response to HIV, TB and malaria, both donor and recipient countries must sustain political and financial commitment to the effort," Goosby said.

The ambassador said further that hard-hit countries need to develop clear-cut strategies for addressing the epidemic to demonstrate their responsibility and capability to cope with the crisis. Maintaining accountability on how AIDS funds are spent, and collaboration between local and international efforts will also be important, Goosby said.

With coordinated efforts and unified vision, Goosby said, the combined efforts of international agencies and local governments can decrease the cost of care delivery overall, while helping more people

"In this time of global financial constraint, it is more important than ever that we work towards one united response to save the most lives possible," Goosby said.

Ethiopia has done a "remarkable job," said Jaramillo, in how it has worked with international donors to devise a local strategy for improving health care. Drawing on support provided by both PEPFAR and the Global Fund, Ethiopia has greatly expanded treatment for persons with HIV/AIDS, Jaramillo said, and built a health care system that is now reaching 92 percent of the country's population.

"HIV mortality is down 50 percent in Ethiopia today," said Jaramillo. "Malaria deaths are down 40 percent, and TB mortality is down 32 percent."

Ambassador Goosby said the United States applauds recent reforms instituted by the Global Fund to bring greater effectiveness and efficiency to the distribution of resources.

About 23,000 delegates from more than 190 countries attended the weeklong AIDS conference in Washington, participating in scores of workshops, lectures and discussions about their mission to contain the AIDS epidemic and reduce the suffering it brings to persons living with HIV/AIDS, their families and communities.

The conference was an opportunity for the Obama administration to build support for its goal to create an AIDS-free generation in the years to come through treating the ill and preventing the spread of the disease.

(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://iipdigital.usembassy.gov>)